

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11

EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01 AGRE-00 /075 W

-----072899 211932Z /47

R 200945Z MAY 78

FM AMEMBASY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 300

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 2258

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRD, CB, SN

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE DELEGATION'S VISIT TO CAMBODIA

REF: SINGAPORE 2257

1. SUMMARY: SEVEN-MAN GOS DELEGATION LED BY MFA
ECONOMIC DIVISION CHIEF LEE CHIONG GIAM VISITED CAMBODIA
MAY 12-16 AND WORKED OUT "SPECIAL TRADING ARRANGEMENT".
LEE'S COMMENTS TO US INDICATE SOME REBUILDING EFFORTS
UNDER WAY IN CAMBODIA. END SUMMARY.

2. DCM AND ECON COUNSELLOR MAY 19 DICUSSED GOS DELEGATION'S
VISIT WITH LEE, WHO SAID STRAITS TIMES REPORT ON RESULTS
OF TRADE MEETING ACCURATE (ARTICLE TRANSMITTED SEPTTEL).
LEE NOTED THAT HE HAD SERVED AS GOS CHARGE IN PHNOM PENH
FOR FOUR YEARS UNTIL 1973.

3. CAMBODIA NEGOTIATORS WERE LED BY CHAIRMAN OF
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TRADE COMMITTEE VAN RIT, WHOSE RANK IS AT MINISTERIAL
LEVEL AND WHO WAS DESCRIBED BY LEE AS A "SEASONED
CHAP" ABOUT 51 YEARS OLD WHO UNDERSTOOD TRADE MATTERS
PERFECTLY WELL. LEE SPECULATED THAT TRADE OFFICIALS
THEY SAW HAD BEEN JUNIOR BUREAUCRATS DURING HIS TIME
IN PHNOM PENH; HE MET NO ONE HE HAD KNOWN FIVE YEARS
AGO. CAMBODIANS SPOKE TO GOS GROUP IN ENGLISH. LEE

DESCRIBED TALKS AS STRICTLY BUSINESS, FOCUSSED ON MODALITIES OF TRADE, ALTHOUGH CAMBODIANS CLOTHED THEIR STATEMENTS IN IDEOLOGICAL PHRASEOLOGY. HE SAID THERE WAS NO BARGAINING OVER PRICES; HE TALKED "GENTLY" WITH THEM TO AVOID ANY CONFRONTATION AND WILL EXCHANGE PRICE QUOTATIONS LATER. HE ALSO NOTED THAT HE SEVERAL TIMES MENTIONED OR DEMONSTRATED THAT HE SPEAKS SOME CAMBODIAN IN ORDER TO SHOW STRAIGHTFORWARD GOOD FAITH. GOG FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS WERE DESCRIBED AS TAKLATIVE, BUT BOTH SIDES REPORTEDLY TOOK CARE TO AVOID CONTROVERSIAL POLITICAL SUBJECTS.

4. LEE SAID AIRPORT AT PHNOM PENH WAS WELL-MAINTAINED BUT THERE WERE VERY FEW PERSONNEL IN EVIDENCE, REFLECTING SMALL NUMBER OF FLIGHTS. HE ASSUMES THAT REFUELING AND MAINTENANCE CAPABILITY EXISTS SINCE PRC 707'S FLY IN AND OUT. PHNOM PENH SEEMED EMPTY. FROM LIGHTS SHOWING AFTER DARK, LEE GUESSED ONLY FIVE TO TEN PERCENT OF BUILDINGS OCCUPIED. CITY WAS CLEAN, HOWEVER, WATER SUPPLY WORKED, AND STREET LIGHTS WERE ON IN MAIN STREETS. SOME FORMER SHOP/HOUSES HAD BEEN TRANSFORMED TO SMALL CLOTHING WORKSHOPS. MAJOR BRIDGE OVER BASSAC RIVER WAS STILL OUT, BUT SMALLER BRIDGES (PERHAPS THOSE REPAIRABLY BY ARMY RATHER THAN CIVIL ENGINEERS) HAD BEEN PATCHED UP. BASIC INDUSTRY AROUND PHEOM PENH SEEMED TO BE IN OPERATION. LEE NOTED THAT SOFT DRINKS IN HOTEL

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HAD NO LABELS AND SUGGESTED THEY MIGHT BE FROM CHINA. BEFORE LEAVING PHNOM PENH, GOS DELEGATION PAID COURTESY CALL ON IENG SARY AND HE HOSTED DINNER IN THEIR HONOR.

5. AFTER TRADE TALKS, CAMBODIANS TOOK GOS DELEGATION ON VISIT TO SIEM REAP, DRIVING THEM FROM PHNOM PENH BY MAIN ROAD THAT GOES NORTH OF TONLE SAP. ROAD SHOWED EVIDENCE OF WAR DAMAGE, BUT POTHOLES HAD BEEN FILLED. MOST OF VILLAGES ALONG 300 SOME KILOMETERS TRIP HAD BEEN DESTROYED. PRIORITY ATTENTION SEEMED TO BE GIVEN TO AGRICULTURE; THERE WERE LARGE CREWS WORKING ON IRRIGATION CANALS AND MANY WERE ALREADY COMPLETED. LEE STOPPED AND TALKED WITH FARMERS SEVERAL TIMES ALONG WAY. HIS IMPRESSION WAS THAT THEY WERE BETTER OFF THAN THEY WERE FIVE YEARS AGO. CITY DOCTORS, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE NOW AVAILABLE TO FARMERS. CAMBODIANS TOLD HIM PEOPLE WILL GRADUALLY BE RETURNED TO THE CITIES. LEE NOTED THAT MESS HALLS WERE BEING BUILT OF BRICK IN A FEW COMMUNES; HE ASSUMED THEY WOULD BE SHOW PLACES FOR VISITORS. ONLY FOREIGNERS HE SAW WERE A FEW CHINESE NEAR SIEM REAP. ANGKOR SEEMED TO HAVE SUSTAINED VERY LITTLE DAMAGE AND WAS BEING WELL CARED FOR. GUIDES WHO SHOWED PARTY AROUND ANGKOR SAID IT WAS PART OF THEIR NATIONAL

HERITAGE AND HAD BEEN BUILT BY CAMBODIAN "PROLETARIAT".
PASSING ONE SMALL AREA THAT APPARENTLY HAD BEEN DAMAGED BY
ROCKET, GUIDES BLAMED IT ON IMPERIALIST FORCES.

6. COMMENT: WHILE TRADE WAS NO DOUBT AN IMPORTANT PURPOSE
OF VISIT, WE ARE SURE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE FIRST-HAND LOOK AT
CAMBODIA WAS MAJOR SINGAPORE MOTIVE. IN ADDITION TO LEE,
WHOSE PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN CAMBODIA MAKES HIM A KNOWLEDGEABLE
OBSERVER, MFA INDOCHINES SPECIALIST PETER CHAN WAS ALSO ON
DELEGATION. CHAN IS NO EXPERT ON TRADE MATTERS.

7. GOS APPARENTLY WISHES TO OPEN AND MAINTAIN COMMUNICATIONS
CHANNELS WITH INDOCHINESE STATES, PARTLY TO HAVE BETTER IDEA
OF WHAT GOES ON IN THEM AND PARTLY TO ENCOURAGE WHATEVER TRADE
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AND OTHER LINKAGES THEY MAY BE WILLING TO ESTABLISH, IN HOPES
THAT SUCH LINKAGES WILL HELP PROPEL THEM IN DIRECTION OF
MODERATION IN THEIR BEHAVIOR TOWARD ASEAN NEIGHBORS.
HOLDRIDGE

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